

Series: 1999-2000

Circular Letter: C-17

TO: Superintendents of Schools

FROM: Theodore S. Sergi, Commissioner of Education

DATE: May 24, 2000

SUBJECT: Legislative Highlights

The Connecticut General Assembly recently completed this year's regular legislative session and passed a number of proposals affecting education and the operation of school districts. While we have not yet had an opportunity to prepare a comprehensive document describing all of this legislation, we thought it would be helpful to you at this time to have a brief overview of the most significant initiatives affecting local and regional boards of education. A more complete summary will be available by the August back-to-school meeting sponsored by this department and the Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents.

(Please note that the Governor has not signed the bills described in this letter, except as indicated. However, we expect he will be signing all of them.)

MANDATORY SCHOOL ATTENDANCE AGE

"An Act Concerning the Mandatory School Attendance Age," P.A. 00-157

- Effective July 1, 2001, students must stay in school until age 18, rather than 16, unless they graduate from high school or their parents or others having control over them personally appear at the school and sign a withdrawal form consenting to their leaving school at age 16 or 17.

CIVICS FOR HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION

"An Act Requiring a Civics Course for High School Graduation," P.A. 00-156

- Beginning with high school classes graduating in 2004, students must have at least a one-half credit course in civics and American government in order to receive a high school diploma. This course is to be part of the credits required in social studies; the total minimum number of credits to graduate has not been increased.

EDUCATIONAL TECHNOLOGY

“An Act Concerning Education Aid,” P.A. 00-187

- A **comprehensive, multi-agency initiative** concerning educational technology has been enacted. This legislation includes the **establishment of a Commission for Educational Technology within the state’s Department of Information Technology** and provides that the Department of Education:
 1. Develop **computer technology competency standards for students**;
 2. Administer **grant programs** for (A) local and regional boards of education for wiring and connectivity, the purchase or lease of computers, and interactive software and the purchase and installation of software filters (\$10 M) and (B) innovative teacher training on the integration of technology into the public school curriculum in order to improve student learning (it appears that the Department of Education will have \$2.5 M for this purpose);
 3. Develop and maintain a **centralized website** for educators to share lesson plans, curriculum resources and technology resource opportunities;
 4. Biennially report to the General Assembly on the status of educational technology in public schools; and
 5. Adopt regulations to provide standards for the certification of **computer science teachers**.
- This initiative also provides that the new commission and a number of state agencies, in various collaborative efforts:
 1. Develop a five-year plan for the implementation of the **Connecticut Education Network** to provide state-of-the-art, high-speed, reliable Internet access and video, voice, and data transmissions that electronically link all educational institutions in the state. The plan is to include the establishment of a **Connecticut Digital Library** and a state-wide application for the federal **Universal Service Fund**;
 2. Develop minimum and model **technology standards for school construction** projects;
 3. Develop, and update biennially, (A) a state-wide standard for **teacher and administrator competency** in the use of technology for instructional purposes and (B) a state-wide plan to assist teachers and administrators to achieve the standard;
 4. Contract for the development of a **Connecticut Parent Technology Academy**; and
 5. Provide opportunities for boards of education to make educational technology **purchases under state-wide contracts**.

GRANTS AND NEW INITIATIVES

“An Act Concerning Education Aid,” P.A. 00-187

“An Act Concerning A Competitive Grant Program for Certain High School Projects and Quality After School Programs,” P.A. 00-193

- A \$4 M grant program has been established to assist the **schools**, except those in Hartford, identified by the State Board of Education pursuant to Public Act 99-288 as **in need of improvement**. Hartford is to use a portion of its ECS Supplemental School Aid (\$5.7 M) to assist its schools that have been so identified.
- Provisions concerning grants for **summer and week-end school programs** (appropriation increased to \$3.7 M), **school readiness, ECS, OPEN Choice program transportation, lighthouse schools, youth service bureaus, charter schools** (per pupil amount increased to \$7,000), **regional educational service centers, and interdistrict magnet schools** operated by regional educational service centers (\$5 M added to the magnet school appropriation) have been amended.
- The Department of Education must develop and implement a **state-wide public school information system** to establish a standardized electronic data collection and reporting protocol. The initial design will focus on student information. A pilot system project is to be initiated by the 2002-03 school year.
- A **Commission on Teacher and Administrator Shortage and Minority Recruitment** has been established.
- The **minimum expenditure requirement (MER)** has been amended to remove the provision for increases tied to enrollment growth. The MER still goes down if enrollment declines. (The Department of Education website has revised MER estimates.)
- The **ECS regional bonus** increased from \$25 to \$100 per student. However, most of the impact from this change will be limited until the phase-out of the grant cap occurs in 2004.

The funding for the programs described above is in *“An Act Making Deficiency Appropriations for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 2000,” S.A. 00-13 (signed by the Governor May 5, 2000)* and *“An Act Concerning Individual Development Accounts . . . ,” P.A. 00-192*. The deficiency appropriations bill also appropriates one-time surplus revenue sharing (a total of \$34 M) to each town in the state which, I have been advised, is in part to assist towns with the costs related to the provision of special education.

SCHOOL CONSTRUCTION

“An Act Concerning Authorization Of State Grant Commitments For School Building Projects,” S.A. 00-10 (signed by the Governor May 16, 2000)

“An Act Concerning Revisions to the Education Statutes,” P.A. 00-220

- The entire \$1.5 B **priority list of school construction projects** was approved.
- While there was a **proposal** this session **to cap** the amount that the state is able to bond for school construction purposes, that proposal did not go forward.
- The definition of a **renovation project** has been amended making it easier for districts to qualify for this type of a school construction project.
- The scope of the required **audit** for projects not audited within 5 years of the final grant application filing has been limited.
- The Department of Education has been granted the authority to approve **roof replacement projects** eliminating the one-year legislative authorization process.

I hope that this information has been helpful to you. If you have any questions, Department of Education staff members are ready and willing to assist you. In most cases you will know from past experience with whom to consult. For instance, please contact Robert Brewer, Director of the Division of Grants Management, at (860) 566-8204 for information on the grant formula changes. If you have specific legislative questions, please call Katherine Nicoletti, Esq., in the Office of Legal and Governmental Affairs at (860) 566-5244.

TSS:ktn